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ABSTRACT

Classroom use of role-playing in English-as-a-Second-Language (ESL) instruction in Japan is described. The purpose is to improve students' verbal and nonverbal communication skills and to link and use previously built schema, in both structured and improvised situations. Units designed around a short listening passage, a short reading passage, and viewing of an authentic videotaped segment are explained. For the listening passage, students hear a 45-second dialogue between three people, which includes introducing an individual and some small talk. After listening, the class discusses the interaction, students practice the dialogue and nonverbal behavior in small groups, then personalize it or improvise a similar situation. The reading role play begins with assignment of a 10-12 page section of a novel, then proceeds to discussion, re-creation of scenes, vocabulary practice, role plays, and finally, a question-and-answer session with observers. Brief videotape recordings of real situations, such as a job interview, are used in a similar way as the basis for structured class and small-group activities. For most students, moving from less to more structured role-playing allows students to proceed at their own pace while building confidence. (MSE)

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Role Play and Foreign Language Learning

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(This article is based on the presentation, "Using Role Play in the Beginning-Level Language Classroom the 1997 International JALT Conference in Hamamatsu, Japan, Oct. 9-12, 1997.)

One challenge of the foreign language instructor is creating activities that not only engage the students but also serve as tools for target language acquisition. Role play can be integrated into many theme and/or content-based lessons as a building block of previous lessons while being a fun and creative way for learners to practice and/or improvise verbal and nonverbal communication. Role playing authentic situations in the language classroom is one successful technique which I have implemented into both English as a Foreign Language (EFL) and English as a Second Language (ESL) instruction. Some educators believe that language learners can gain a deeper awareness of the target culture by means of experiences in which they role play authentic situations (Shrum & Glisan, 1994). Snyder and DeSelms (1983) find that interactive communicative activities let students develop self-worth and understand one another. Because role play is an interactive activity which allows students to use the target language for communication, it may, according to Snyder and DeSelms, help students gain confidence in their interactions with one another while using the target language at the same time. Role playing and dramatic techniques can also:

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1) increase motivation and interest,

2) convey and reinforce information,

3) develop language skills,

4) change attitudes,

5) and teach language and cultural awareness (Greenblat, 1988).

Cultural awareness can be integrated into the foreign language classroom through explanation, modeling, discussion and role playing of nonverbal behavior as well as target language verbal communication. The extent to which the teacher offers specific suggestions will depend on the cognitive and linguistic levels of the students (Curtain & Pesola, 1988). Damon (1986) groups nonverbal communicative behavior into three main categories--paralanguage, kinesics, and proxemics. Paralanguage refers primarily to the tone of voice

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accompanying the actual verbal output. Kinesics is the actual body movement, which includes touching (haptics) and eye contact (oculism). Proxemics is nonverbal communicative behavior, which the use of space and the manipulation of objects exemplifies. When preparing role plays, students benefit from well-organized instructions and guidance, such as model situations and hints concerning vocabulary and grammar use (Curtain & Pesola, 1988). Explanation and practice of both verbal and nonverbal behavior in the target language is key to laying the groundwork and the students' success in role play activities.

The purpose of role play in my EFL classrooms in Japan is to improve students' verbal and nonverbal communicative skills as well as to tie together and use previously built schema, allowing students to use English in structured activities and then in less structured and improvised activities (Maxwell & Matsuta, 1996). For beginning-level language learners, structured activities are safe in that students are not expected to produce language that they do not know and hence establish feelings of confidence in learners. In my ESL classrooms in the US, role play was integrated into a reading and writing course and served as a tool for the instructor to evaluate students' reading comprehension while again gelling what the students had learned through the readings. Role play also served as a valuable pre-writing activity in the ESL classroom. Below are descriptions of role play units which grew from a short listeining passage, a reading passage, and viewing an authentic video-taped segment respectively.

Listening and Role Play

To implement role play using a short listening passage to lay schemate, students first listen to a 45-second dialog between three people, which includes introducing a person and small talk. After listening to the passage, the instructor asks students questions pertaining to the content of the dialog to determine students' comprehension. If the students get the gist of the dialog they then complete a cloze dialog for more precise listening practice. The structured activities continue with pronunciation practice, language use explanations, and review of grammatical structures contained in the dialog. The instructor may also demonstrate gestures and other nonverbal communicative behavior at this point. With this information, students practice the dialog in groups of three to integrate the presented verbal and nonverbal communication.

The students then use the original dialog and personalize it. When students first begin to do imaginative work, Sadow suggests that students work with structured paired or small group activities such as rewriting conversations or dialogs to change the characters (Sadow, 1987). Students use their own names and information to create a new personalized script that is based on the original listening passage. From this point, the students have two options. Option one involves continuing the personalized dialog and should include an introduction, small talk, an invitation, a pre-closing, and a closing. The students memorize this dialog and perform it in small groups. This first option is still a somewhat structured activity, yet it allows students to use information about their own lives to role play a conversation between three people.

The second option that students may choose is much less structured, requiring students to improvise a similar situation as in option one. Thus, students who choose the second option also role play a conversation which includes an introduction, small talk, invitation, pre-closing, and closing. In this situation, however, students are given information cards which describe each "character's" personal information (Appendix A). In groups of three, students study the cards for 10 minutes before improvising the situation. The challenge of improvising a situation lies in understanding the concept and language of a situation so as to be able to communicate without the assistance of a script.

Evaluation of both the first and second role play options can be done using a Likert-scale learner-centered approach (Appendix B). For evaluation to be most reliable, I suggest video-taping the role plays so that each role play can be evaluated twice--live and on video. The average score of the live and video-taped performance then serves as the groups' final role play score.

Reading and Role Play

I originally designed this role play unit while teaching Japanese ESL students who were studying in the US. During the 13-week course, students read the novel *The Diary of Anne Frank* and developed their reading, listening and speaking skills as pre-writing activities for persuasive essay writing. Below is a rough schedule that instructors can follow when combining role play with readings.

For the role play activity, students work in peer groups of three or four students. Each peer group is assigned a 10 to12-page section of the assigned novel from which to create their role plays.

1. Individually, each group member reads the assigned section. Each group member creates a list enumerating the main events in that section.

2. Group members discuss the main events and decide on two events that they will role play. At home, members write a paragraph about each event that they will role play.

3. Students create scenes with dialogs depicting the main events in their reading section. For this step, students must draw inferences because the dialog is not clearly spelled out in the text. Each group also writes or outlines a summary of the reading section which will be presented before the role play.

4. Students list 10 new vocabulary words from the reading section and then prepare an overhead transparency with vocabulary words, their synonyms, antonyms, different word forms, and sentences including the vocabulary words in context.

5. Each group performs role plays. Each role play includes an introductory overview and a thorough presentation of new vocabulary words.

6. After groups perform, group members answer questions from observers for five to 10 minutes. Group members must stay in the roles of the characters they portrayed in the role play.

Evaluation of the role plays is learner centered. After all groups have performed their role plays, students choose two role plays to write about in an in-class writing task. Students summarize the chosen role play presentations as thoroughly and accurately as possible. Students may use their notes but may not use the novel. Thus, testing assesses listening comprehension as well as reading comprehension through listening. (It is assumed that all students have read the sections that they were not assigned for role plays.)

Video and Role Play

Authentic video clips also provide a springboard for role play in the language classroom. First, students view short video segments depicting a target situation; for example,

a job interview. Viewing authentic situations of the target culture shows the significance of nonverbal communication such as kinesics, oculism, and proxemics. By viewing the video clip, students can see and compare the differences in these three nonverbal communicative behaviors between their own culture and the target culture. Such comparison makes students more aware of the nonverbal communication representative of their own culture and language. After viewing, the students are given the actual script to the video clip and watch again. The instructor then discusses the colloquial expressions and vocabulary contained in the script.

The video and video script are the bases of the structured activities. First, students practice the original script, and after becoming comfortable witht the language of the script, a cloze dialog based on the original script is administered and students personalize a new situation with their own information. Students then memorize the personalized dialog and practice in pairs. Memorizing the dialog keeps the role play activity structured and "safe" for beginning-level language learners; however, students do have the option to improvise and express themselves by using the nonverbal communication discussed earlier. After memorizing the script, students perform role plays in front of their peers.

Conclusion

Role playing authentic situations is one avenue leading to improved communicative ability in the target language. For the instructor, role play is a versatile activity in that it can be based on authentic listening passages, readings, or videos. For most learners, moving from structured activities to less structured activities allows them to proceed at their own pace while building confidence. Through role play, students can also learn the significance of the spoken and nonspoken word in their own as well as in the target language and culture.

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Appendix A

Information sheets for improvisational role play.

Reiko

- Your English teacher is Christina.
- You know Yoshi.
- You are interested in English. You plan to go to the US.
- You recently went to a Madonna concert.
- You play piano. You like classical music.
- You are free on Saturday night.

Kiyoshi

- You are friends with Yoshi.
- Your English teacher is John.
- Your are in a band with Yoshi (folk and rock music).
- You want to meet Reiko.
- You have friends in the US.
- You like Madonna.
- You are free on Saturday night.

Yoshi

- You are friends with Kiyoshi.
- Reiko is in your English class.
- Your English teacher is Christina.
- You are in a band with Kiyoshi.
- You are in the same club as Kiyoshi.
- You will introduce Kiyoshi to Reiko.
- You are free on Saturday night.

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Live/Video

ROLE PLAY
PEER EVALUATIONS FOR GROUPS

1. This presentation was organized:		1	2	3	4	5
2. The presenters were easy to understand:		1	2	3	4	5
3. I understood the main events in the role play:		1	2	3	4	5
Verbal Delivery						
4.	Voice	1	2	3	4	5
5.	Tempo	1	2	3	4	5
6.	Sentence flow	1	2	3	4	5
7.	Articulation	1	2	3	4	5
Nonverbal Delivery						
8.	Stage presence	1	2	3	4	5
9.	Gestures	1	2	3	4	5
10.	Eye contact w/audience or other presenters	1	2	3	4	5
Necessary Elements						
11.	Greeting	1	2	3	4	5
12.	Small talk	1	2	3	4	5
13.	Interjections (filler words)	1	2	3	4	5
14.	Buying time	1	2	3	4	5
15.	Introduction of a third person	1	2	3	4	5
16.	Invitation	1	2	3	4	5
17.	Accept/decline invitation	1	2	3	4	5
18.	Preclosing	1	2	3	4	5
19.	Closing	1	2	3	4	5
Participation Of Group Members						
20.	Equality	1	2	3	4	5

The presentation would have been better if:

I liked this presentation because:

TOTAL POINTS: _____/100
Name of evaluator: _____

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